

THE PLAN [YONAH 4:6]

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin

The Lord G-d (hahsem Elokim) appointed a ricinus plant and it rose above Yonah to save him from his evil...(4,6).

This is truly miraculous. A plant rises over Yonah's head and saves him from the heat of the sun. What's more, it grows to this monstrous size overnight, ("which appeared overnight", verse 10) without Yonah taking note. As described, the imagery is that of Yona sitting in the desert, and suddenly a large and bushy leaved plant rises above him, expressly above him. Amazingly, Yonah remains clueless of the implications of this marvelous event.

What is the evil from which Yonah was saved? Although classic commentators understood it to be the heat of the sun, a suggestion has been made that it is the same 'evil' described in verse 1; in other words, the distress and frustration that seized Yonah when he realized that Nineveh will be saved after all (A. Rivlin, Yonah: Nevuah V'Tochacha, p. 168).

This is the only time that Hashem is called Hashem Elokim (in many translations, Lord G-d) in this prophetic book. Most often, it employs the term Elokim, often translated generically as G-d. Among the few deviations from this pattern is when He appointed the fish to save Yonah (2,1); He was then referred to by his ineffable name, YKVK or Hashem (literally the Name). We may ask what is the significance in this portrayal of G-d as Hashem Elokim at this juncture of the story of Yonah?

A seminal comment of the great commentator Rashi on Genesis 1,1 may enlighten us. He takes note that creation of world is described using the name Elokim in Chapter 1 but changes to employing the name Hashem Elokim, in Chapter 2. Rashi writes: "In the beginning Elokim made heaven and earth - in the Beginning He thought to create the world with the quality of Justice. He saw that the world cannot survive and He preceded the quality of Mercy to Justice and partnered them together. This is what it says, "On the day that Hashem Elokim made heaven and earth (in Ch. 2)".

Yonah also found himself in the classic situation of Justice and Mercy intertwined. What's more, Mercy preceded Justice.

The Lord G-d appointed a ricinus plant and it rose above Yonah to save him from his evil...(4,6).

And G-d appointed an east wind and the sun beat down on Yonah's head (4,8).

Throughout his story, Yonah railed and struggled against Mercy as the guiding principle for how Hashem runs the world. He wanted that it should be led though Justice, for the success of the

wicked was more intolerable to him than the suffering of the righteous. What he did not know and has not even begun to realize is that it is not pure Justice or pure Mercy that runs the world; in truth, the world is run by both joined together. It is no wonder then that he was not ready for the message of the miracle that the overnight sprouting of the ricinus plant represented. It was not Justice but neither was it Mercy, for when the plant rose over Yonah's head, he had not yet begun to suffer. What Yonah could not yet see was the profound intertwining of good and evil that the merciful and just Creator uses as His operating method. Often, events and situations pass us by and we do not understand or appreciate their ultimate significance, for we are being prepared for what is yet to come. As we have seen in past lessons, Mercy requires that G-d's hand in history and in our own lives be obscured, for were it to be visible and open, there would remain no freedom to choose good or evil, and Justice would dominate the world.

Yet, Mercy is there and it waits to become manifest. You might say that the power of incipient evil is always countered by what already exists and by what has already been set in motion. G-d creates the cure before the wound (Megilah 13b). Mercy always precedes Justice and is there, already in place to meet and counter it. Every human being has experienced events that appeared to be an unmitigated disaster or tragedy at the time, but were later discovered to carry within them seeds of great salvation. We have all known times when Mercy preceded Justice; only like Yonah we are not prepared to see or realize it. "Mercy precedes Justice", in this a person of faith finds great consolation and is enabled to cling to the Almighty in perfect faith despite being surrounded by trials, for he awaits sprouting of deliverance from the seeds that have already been planted.

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